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DRAFTING OF A DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND ORGANS OF SOCIETY TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Written statement submitted by Baha'i International Community, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[8 January 1993]

1. The Baha'i International Community welcomes the achievement, by the Commission on Human Rights open-ended working group, of consensus on most provisions of the draft declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. In general, we endorse the principles adopted by the working group in its first reading text; our comments are, therefore, limited to a few key areas.

The right to information and education concerning individual rights and fundamental freedoms

2. The Baha'i International Community believes that the right to information protected by chapter II of the text is essential if fundamental human rights are to become a reality for all people.

3. More important, as is especially emphasized in article 5 of chapter II of the draft declaration, education in fundamental human rights sensitizes individuals to the rights of others. It encourages each person to develop a personal commitment to building a broader sense of community. Such education is necessary not only to ensure that knowledge of human rights will be disseminated generally, but also to help build a durable, supportive social order in which human rights are a day-to-day reality for every individual.

The responsibility of all persons to promote human rights

4. Draft article 5 of chapter V, which has not been agreed upon by the working group, deals with the duties of every person to promote respect for the rights of other members of the community; we consider this one of the most important provisions of the draft declaration.

5. The realization of human rights does not involve only action by the Government or freedom from unjust government interference or oppression; rather it requires the construction of a progressive social order from the ground level upwards. It demands a new awareness of the reality of human unity and the development among all peoples of an all-inclusive notion of community that extends from the family, to villages, towns, cities and localities, to nations, and, most importantly, to the boundaries of the planet itself. Moreover, given that rights cannot exist without corresponding responsibilities, each member of a community has a responsibility to uphold the rights of the other members based on a recognition of their unity and interdependence.

6. In keeping with the comments above, the text of article 5 could (i) more explicitly acknowledge the responsibility of each individual to promote the well-being of others, as well as of the community as a whole; (ii) recognize that the concept of "community" must encompass every level of society, including the world community, in order for human rights to become a reality; and (iii) consistent with the title of the draft declaration, recognize that promoting respect for the human rights of others is not just a right or just a responsibility, but both.

7. We are aware that the working group has already laboured diligently to arrive at agreement on the essential elements of the draft text. Accordingly, our suggestions attempt to preserve the existing wording of the text as much as possible.

8. We suggest that the draft article 5 be amended to read as follows (additional text underscored):

> "Everyone has duties to the community, in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

"Everyone, individually as well as in association with others, has the right and responsibility to promote the well-being, and respect for the rights, freedoms, identity and human dignity, of all other members of his or her local and national communities, as well as the international community, and to promote the well-being and respect for the identity of these communities as a whole.

"The establishment of a social order, at the local, national and international levels, in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be fully realized is the responsibility of everyone."

We hope that these modest suggestions are helpful to the Commission and to its working group.